

RIMROCK OPERA

EXHIBIT 9
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Mister Chairman, members of the committee; for the record, my name is Tracy Nielsen. I am the Executive Director of the Rimrock Opera Company in Billings. I am testifying on behalf of grant #1232. We are requesting funding for operational support for 2 world-class main stage opera performances a year with 1850+ in attendance.

This grant funding also encompasses our educational outreach arm that in the last year reached over 10,000+ students all over Montana with a non-smoking message delivered in a humorously dramatic form, all the while bringing high performance art to students that would possibly never have the opportunity to experience opera. It has been so well received that we are producing our 3rd and 4th phases this year, widening our reach to extend to very rural communities far from Billings.

Our educational outreach includes a group called From Met to Broadway which is a small scale tour that sings everything from the Met to Broadway tunes. During every main stage opera we invite students for a school show at ABT where they see the dress rehearsal of the first act of the opera.

Rimrock Opera Chorus for Kids or ROCK began in 2004 and now spans ages 7-18 in 3 choirs with 85 members.

All of these elements have a significant price tag and unfortunately foundation grants cover only a small portion of our overall programming. We have tremendous support in our city not only in the form of in-kind sponsorship from businesses but also from local foundations and donors matching dollar for dollar to fund our ever expanding productions. Montana Cultural Trust grants have given us the ability to extend into rural areas of the state with our school tour and to increase our ROCK choirs from 35 students in 2004 to 85 at the present and our summer kids' camp from 32 to 75 kids in the summer of 2006. We have also been able to bring in bigger star power to our main stage productions through funding giving the opportunity for patrons to experience international opera singers in Billings. With limited funding, we will have to look seriously at the possibility of cutting some of these programs.

On a personal note, my family and I are Montanans by heart and choice. We moved from Spokane, WA 5 years ago to Billings. My husband, Radiology PA at Billings Clinic, and I are like many other professionals looking to relocate to Montana. Schools, the economy, cultural arts and entertainment were high on our priority list when looking for a possible city. Because of the many varied cultural opportunities we felt more comfortable leaving behind a larger metropolitan area when we knew that our family would have the same if not better cultural experiences. We attended a RO performance of Carmen 3 weeks after moving to Billings and absolutely loved it. The singing, acting and sets were professional and high quality and the ticket prices were fantastic! We knew we had made the right move.

I respectfully request that you recommend our requested grant funding in it's entirety to continue bringing operatic productions of the highest quality to residents of Montana.

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